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DUDE RANCH

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Dude Ranch

Dude Ranch

The Story of a Modern Cowboy

By

CREIGHTON PEET

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Pettibones lived out in Montana on a dude ranch. One day he was sitting on the corral fence watching the boys do a little plain and fancy roping.

The lady dudes sat across the way while Little Bones dropped a rope around a colt's neck, just as slick as you please.

Little Bones led the roped colt around the corral for the lady dudes to admire.

Sometimes the colts were a little ornery, and it took two or three men to get them tied.

Just then some neighbors drove up with Jimmy, who was Pettibones' best friend. Pettibones asked him to stay for a few days, and see the round-up and the rodeo; and Jimmy said, "Sure, why not?"

So Little Bones went over to the corral where the fresh horses were, and roped a likely little pinto for Jimmy to ride while he was visiting.

"What's his name?" asked Jimmy.

"He hasn't any yet," said Pettibones.

"How about Strawberry Shortcake, because of all those white spots?"

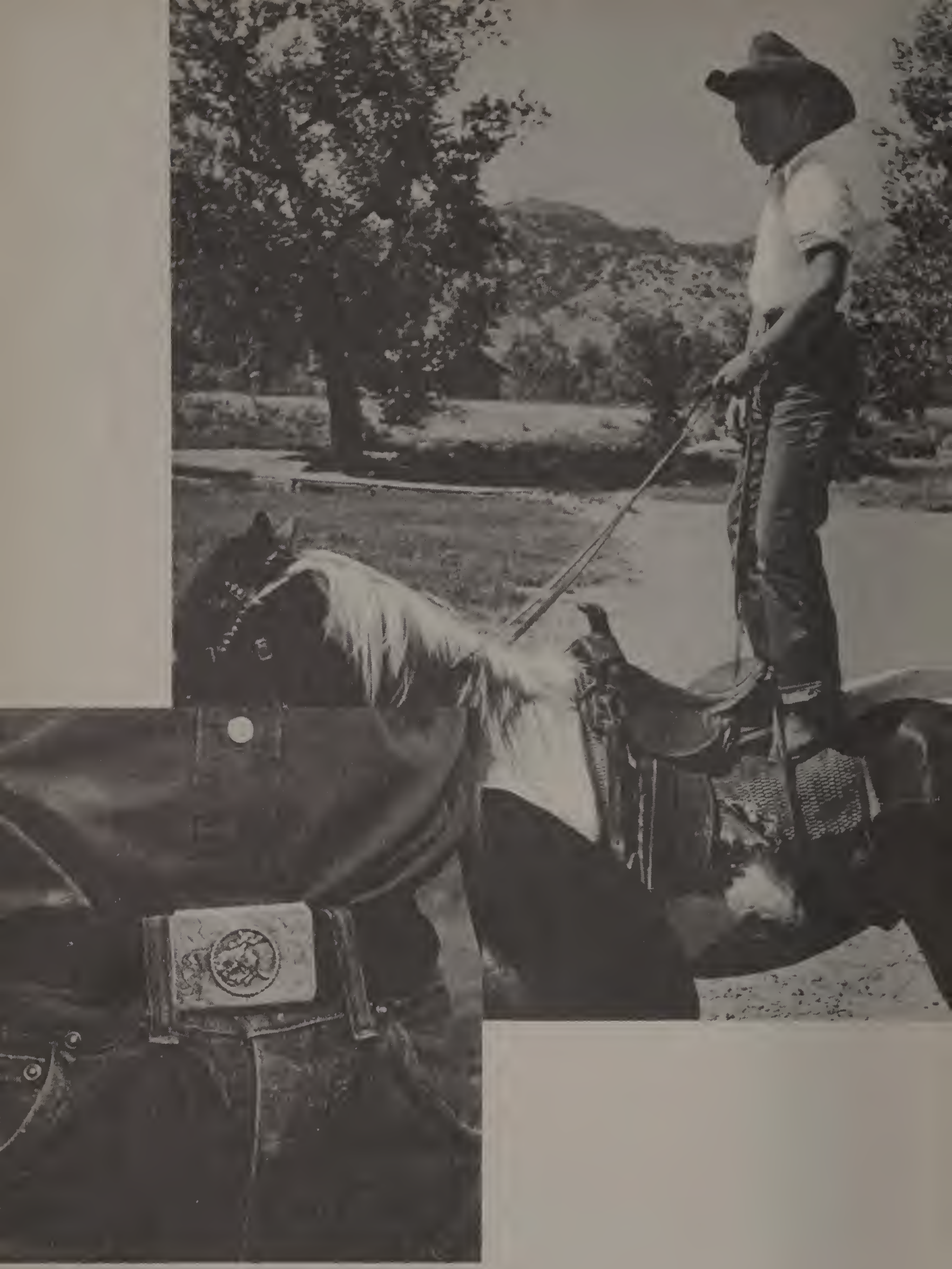
Pettibones thought it over, and said it was O.K. with him if the horse didn't mind.

After Shortcake was saddled, Pettibones said maybe they should go for a ride, so Jimmy could try him out.

As they went along the boys got to planning what they were going to do when they grew up. Jimmy said he wanted to be boss of a big cattle outfit.

Then they decided to give Shortcake a real work-out, and raced down to the ranch.

At the saddle-house they found Dorothy May, Emily Anne, and Alice, and Pepper, the dog. They were all glad to see Jimmy, and asked him how he was making out with his pinto.



Jimmy said "Fine" and showed them how he could even stand on Shortcake's back. Then they noticed the silver buckle on his belt which said, "First Prize, Sheridan Rodeo."

They weren't going on the round-up for a couple of days, so Jimmy gave Shortcake a pail of oats, just to show he was friendly, and turned him out to pasture.

On the way back to the saddle-house they passed Santa Claus, the St. Bernard. When he saw them he was so pleased he knocked over a chair just by wagging his tail.

Then the girls went off for a swim, but Jimmy was too busy learning about a new ranch. He saw Owen fooling with a rope, and asked him how to do the butterfly. Finally Owen made a big loop with both of them inside.

The next morning Jimmy was up by five o'clock, but Owen told him dudes never woke up that early, so he practiced roping, and got to talking about his plans. "Suppose you were a kid my age and wanted to have an outfit of your own some day, what would you do?"

"Well," said Owen, "first of all I'd get myself a pardner."

By this time they were inside the saddle house, and Jimmy asked about the best way to make a hondo, which is the loop your rope runs through in a lasso.

While he was fixing a shoe on a lame mare for one of the dudes, Jimmy thought about getting himself a pardner.

"Hey!" he called over to Pettibones, "want to be my pardner when I start my ranch some day?"

"Sure thing!" answered Pettibones, "and we can take Santa along for a watch dog."

After lunch they took Jimmy over to the farmyard to look at the chickens and the pigs.

Jimmy opened the gate, and they all went in.

In the yard they picked up some of the hens while the chore-man went into the hen-house to look for eggs.

The pigs got a pail of milk and scraps.

Then Jimmy and Santa went out to the pasture
to make sure Shortcake was getting along all right.

Early the next morning Jimmy was up wrangling the horses and getting them saddled so they would be ready when the dudes wanted to go riding.

When all the other work was done the boys roped Shortcake, and called Santa.

In a few minutes the dudes and ranch hands were on their way to the Horsecamp in the hills. Jimmy asked a lot of questions about what it was like back east, but the dudes were so glad to be out west they didn't tell him much.

They were going to pick up some fresh horses for a new batch of dudes who were coming the next day. Jimmy and the cowhands rode up into the back country, and wrangled the horses down toward the camp. After a couple of hours they started breaking over the crest of the hill.

Some of the horses had not been saddled since the summer before, and were sleek and fat and inclined to be a little wild at first.

The wranglers followed them, and Jimmy kept a sharp lookout for any bunch-quitters, that is, horses with independent ideas who try to break away from the pack and head back to the range.

As they got nearer the corral they kicked up a big cloud of dust, and the corral posts shook as the horses pounded against them. Jimmy asked Hank how many horses they had in all, and he said about a hundred and sixty.

After they had picked some fresh horses for the new dudes they went back to the ranch, and Jimmy spent the afternoon running the mower in the alfalfa so there would be some hay to put in the barn. Hank said that even in winter they kept about twenty head of horses at the ranch, and they had to have hay for them.

After dinner they all played a game of softball, and Jimmy made a home run!

Dorothy May and Alice thought Pepper needed a bath, but he didn't seem to think much of the idea.

A family of kittens lived out by the kitchen, and every evening Emily Anne gave them a pan of milk.

They were getting along fine until one night a coyote sneaked in, and killed two chickens, and almost caught the kittens. When Jimmy told one of the dudes about it, the dude said they'd better go hunting for that coyote.

First they stopped off in Lame Deer, where the Indians live, and Dick and Jimmy asked if anybody had seen a man named Goofy Dark Night. They thought maybe he would be able to trail the coyote for them, but Goofy was gone for the day.

So Jimmy and Mac went up to the landing field with the dude while he tuned up his plane to look around for the coyote. Jimmy had never seen a plane near by before, and asked about everything. He figured if he was going to be a rancher himself he'd better find out about all the junk dudes have around.

When the dude came back from scouting around he told Jimmy the coyote must be over to the east. So they went along very slowly through the sage-brush, being careful not to let the coyote catch their scent.

They sat down on a rise of ground, and looked everywhere, but couldn't spot the coyote. However, they did shoot a bobcat which had got wind of them and decided he'd better move. So they gave up, and rode back to the ranch, because they had to start early the next day for the round-up.

After supper Pettibones went out and played with Red Wing, the smallest dog on the ranch. Red Wing had a terrible inferiority complex every time he looked at Santa Claus, but Santa Claus never even noticed he was around.

The only thing that helped Red Wing's inferiority complex was the discovery he was bigger than the kittens. But even they ignored him. Poor Red Wing!

Next day was the big day! Jimmy was so excited he could hardly sleep, and by 4:30 he was up and dressed. The round-up was a long way off, and Jimmy loaded Shortcake into an auto trailer hooked on to the car, so that he would be fresh and rested when he got to working the cattle. As soon as the dudes had finished breakfast they were off.

Some of the hardier dudes went on horseback, but of course they were not going to ride in the round-up, where you need fresh horses.

They left the cars near the chuck-wagon, and Jimmy saddled Shortcake, and rode off with the cow-punchers, who were "making a circle" of cattle for branding. By ten o'clock they had rounded up about 150 head, which is all you can handle at once.

Jimmy watched closely while the bulls and the cows and the calves all came jamming into the corral together, making a terrific noise and dust. Hank told him most of the cattle in Montana nowadays are Herefords and Shorthorns.

"Now there's a mighty thrifty-looking calf," Jimmy said to Pettibones as they drove the last few strays into the corral. "If we had a couple like that this year we'd have a herd big enough to start our own outfit some day."

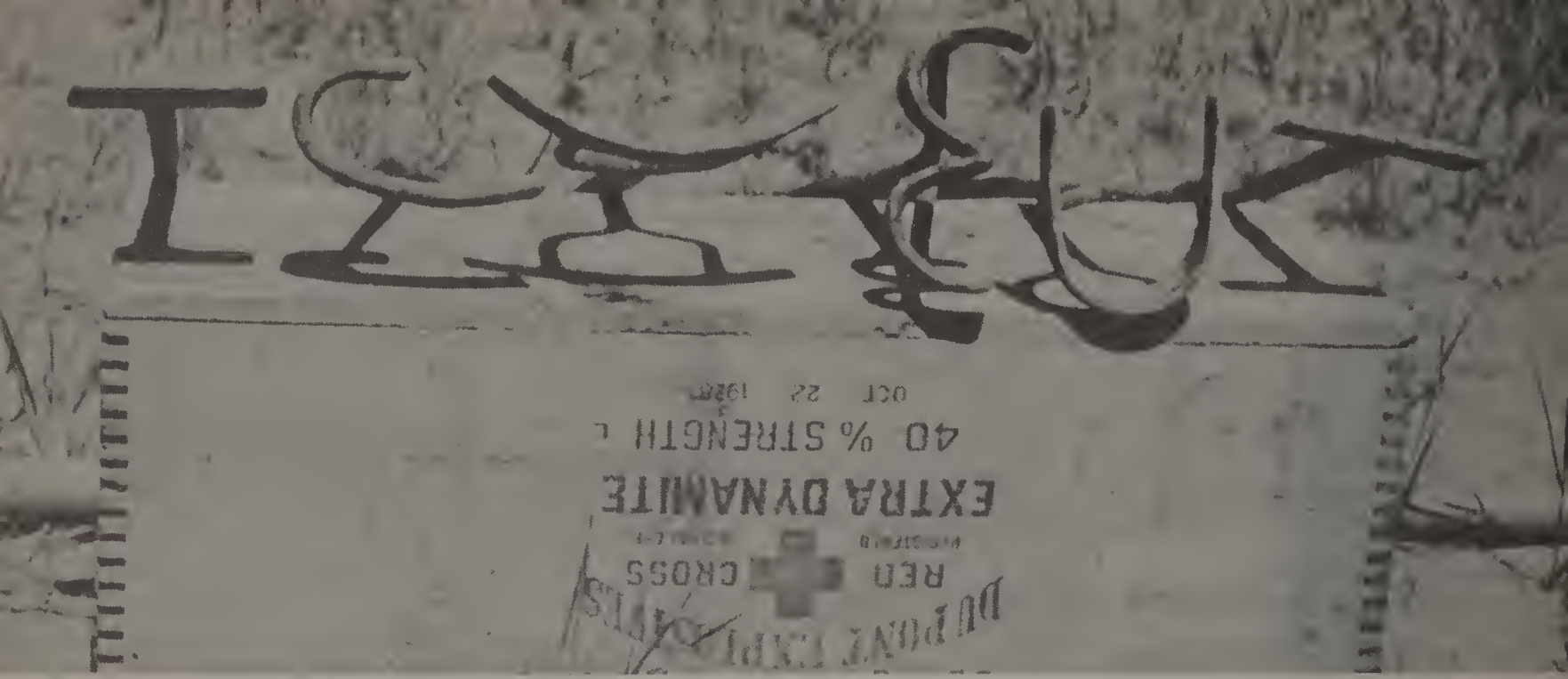
"Sure," said Pettibones, "only we haven't any calves."

All the calf said was "Baaaaaaaaaaa!"

Only twenty or thirty head of cattle are driven into the branding corral at once, new batches being cut in when the men are ready for them.

Inside the corral the men went to work quickly and efficiently. A rider slipped a rope around the calf's hind legs, and pulled him over to where the branders had built their fire.

Calves are only about six months old when they are branded, and are so small and light that two or three men can hold them easily.



Each ranch has a brand of its own which is used on all its cattle or horses, as a sort of trademark. Many different marks can be made from such brands as these. You can see the Bones Ranch brands painted on the doors of the saddle house, the lazy ⊢H for horses, and the ZC for cattle.

The irons are heated in a wood fire built in the corral. Sometimes several ranches will combine on a round-up so that many brands will be in use the same day. Cattlemen know their calves, because the calves stick close to their mothers, which are already branded.

Sometimes nearby ranches send "reps" or representatives to help with the round-up, especially when they think some of their own cattle may be in the herd. The "reps" help with the work, and make the round-up a sort of party, old pals sitting together on the floor of the corral, whittling, spitting and swapping yarns.

While one man is branding a calf another is inoculating it with a serum to keep it from getting a cattle disease known as blackleg.

After all the calves were branded and counted they were turned back on the range for another six months. Although they had made a terrible noise while they were in the corral, as soon as they were free they quieted down.

Most round-ups nowadays have a truck which carries the food, tents, branding irons, etc. A big tent spread over the end of the truck makes a sort of kitchen and dining room. The men sleep in the small teepees.

On his way to the chuck-tent for lunch, Jimmy stopped to wash up a bit.

Inside, the cook was mixing up a cake on the back of the truck. Cowhands work hard, and eat a lot of good solid food, including bread, cake, pie and doughnuts.

In a few minutes the table in the chuck-tent was piled with platters of beef, vegetables and bread. And in another few minutes everything had disappeared.

By the time Jimmy had finished his meat and potatoes the cake was baked, and there was a big pan of chocolate sauce to slosh over it. Jimmy had three spoonfuls, and came back for a second helping. The round-up was moving on that afternoon, so after lunch Jimmy and Pettibones went back to the ranch.

As they were leaving they could see the cow hands going over the rope corral to pick some fresh horses for the afternoon "circle" or round-up. The rope corral is a temporary fence made of rope and iron stakes.

In their off hours the boys did a little knife-trading. Pettibones had one knife without blades which seemed to take quite a little salesmanship.

The next day they were going to have their rodeo at the ranch, so Pettibones went out to the corral to get his horse.

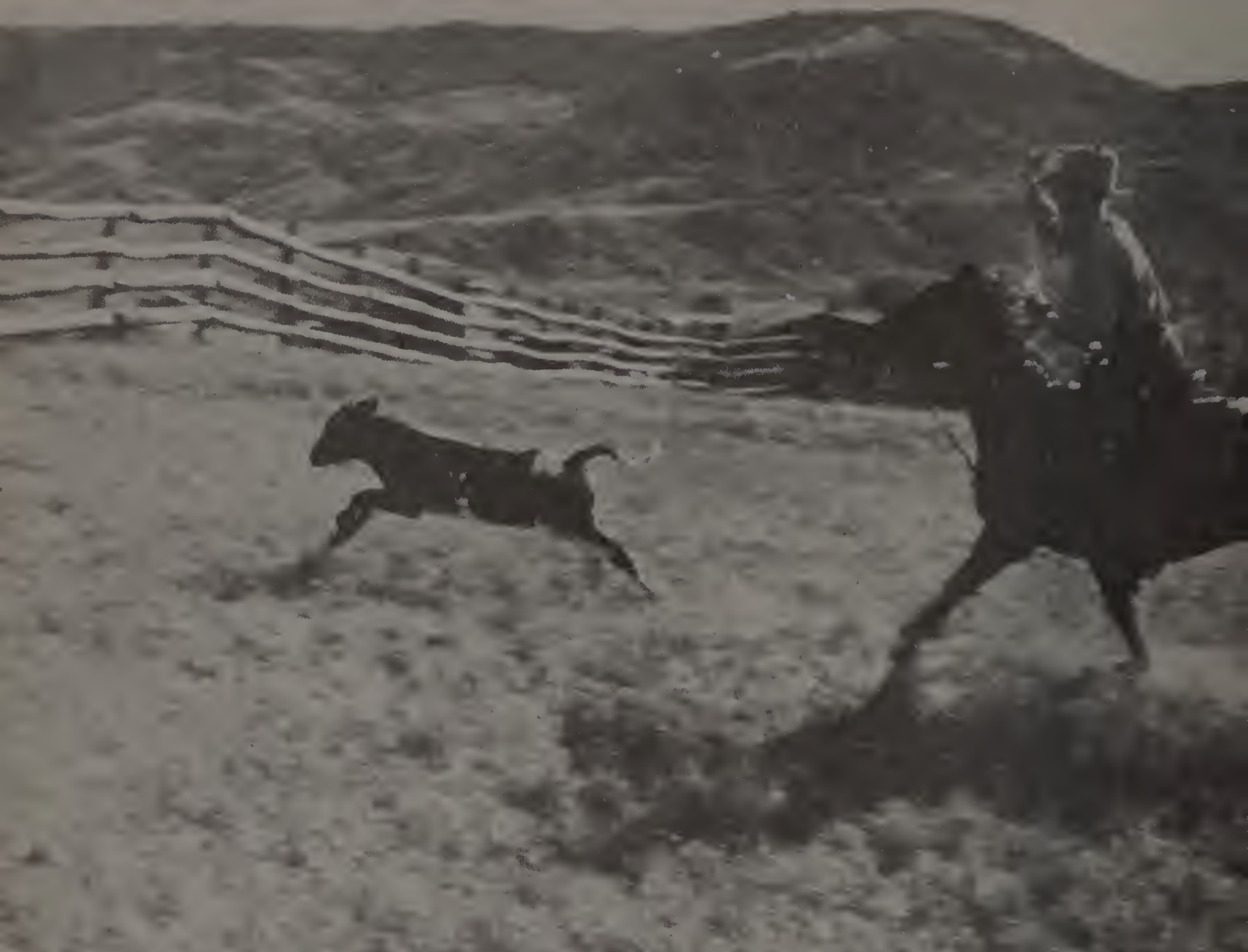
Jimmy helped him, and then saddled Shortcake so that he could go out and do his stuff.

Dorothy May curry-combed Pettibones' horse for him, and polished up the saddle.

Then Little Bones showed the dudes how to ride a wild horse. Cowboys drove the horse into a chute, and then dropped a saddle on his back. This horse has only a halter, no bridle.

As soon as the door was opened the horse came bucking out of the chute, snorting and kicking, pretty mad to find somebody riding him. Riding a bucking broncho is dangerous business, and you only have to stay on 10 seconds to make it count in a contest.

Another rule is that you can hold the halter-rope with only one hand, and must spur the horse three times. After the 10 seconds two "pickup men" come galloping up, one on either side of you. One grabs the halter rope, and the other lifts you off to safety.



Calf-roping was the next event. Jimmy noticed that when a cowboy catches a calf, his horse stands stock still to keep the calf from pulling away. In this contest the cowboy must tie up the calf's two hind feet and one front foot. The ranch record for this is 15 seconds.

Then Jimmy, who was getting impatient for a little action, jumped on to Shortcake and roped himself a calf as it came tearing out of the chute.

In no time at all his calf was down and tied, as neat as a bale of hay.

As a final event Jimmy started to teach Shortcake to jump, beginning with a very low bar. Shortcake shied away the first few times, but soon he was going over in fine form.

Next day the Indians sent word they had seen some of the Bones' horses many miles away from the ranch. So Jimmy and Dick and Hank loaded a couple of saddles on the hood of the car, and went off to look. When they found the horses they rode them back to camp.

Cowboys are always very gallant to the lady dudes, and sometimes Jimmy helped fasten their spurs.

One afternoon when most of the dudes were off riding, Jimmy and Pettibones were sitting in the shadow of a fencepost, making plans for their cattle ranch, when they saw two girl dudes riding off by themselves.

During the rest of the afternoon they didn't do much except have a little argument.

While the boys were fooling around on the lawn the lady dudes had gone a long way from the ranch. After a while they got tired, and stopped to rest. While they were sitting down talking, their horses had wandered off.

Later in the afternoon Jimmy and Pettibones happened to look up to the hill behind the ranch in the direction of Hanging Woman Creek, when they saw two horses with saddles, heading toward the ranch. Being good ranchmen they saw right away they belonged to the two girls who had gone out alone.

The boys couldn't decide what to do. It was easy to see the girls were lost and had no way of getting home. But Pettibones thought maybe they weren't far, and could walk back. Jimmy thought maybe they should do something.

Anyway, to be on the safe side Jimmy roped Shortcake, and Pettibones' horse, just as he had learned.

Shortcake wasn't really ornery, it was just that he didn't want to make things too easy for Jimmy.

Pettibones still thought the girls might come back if they waited, so they sat down for a while, and kept a sharp lookout.

After a while even Pettibones said they'd better do something, so they opened the gate and rode to where the girls' horses were grazing.

First they caught the horses, and then went off in the direction from which they had come.

They rode quite a piece over a couple of hills, and down to a road. On the way they asked some cow hands if they had seen a couple of lady dudes without their horses, but they only laughed, and one said, "Does your mother know you kids are out alone?"

Further along they passed a family of Indians going to town, but they were no help, because Indians always pretend they don't understand English when they don't want to be bothered.

When it got late and they had not found the dudes, Jimmy decided they had better go up a Forest Reserve fire tower to get a good look at the country.

This is what they saw when they got to the little house at the top. At first they couldn't make out anything that looked like dudes, but Jimmy said maybe they were over to the west.

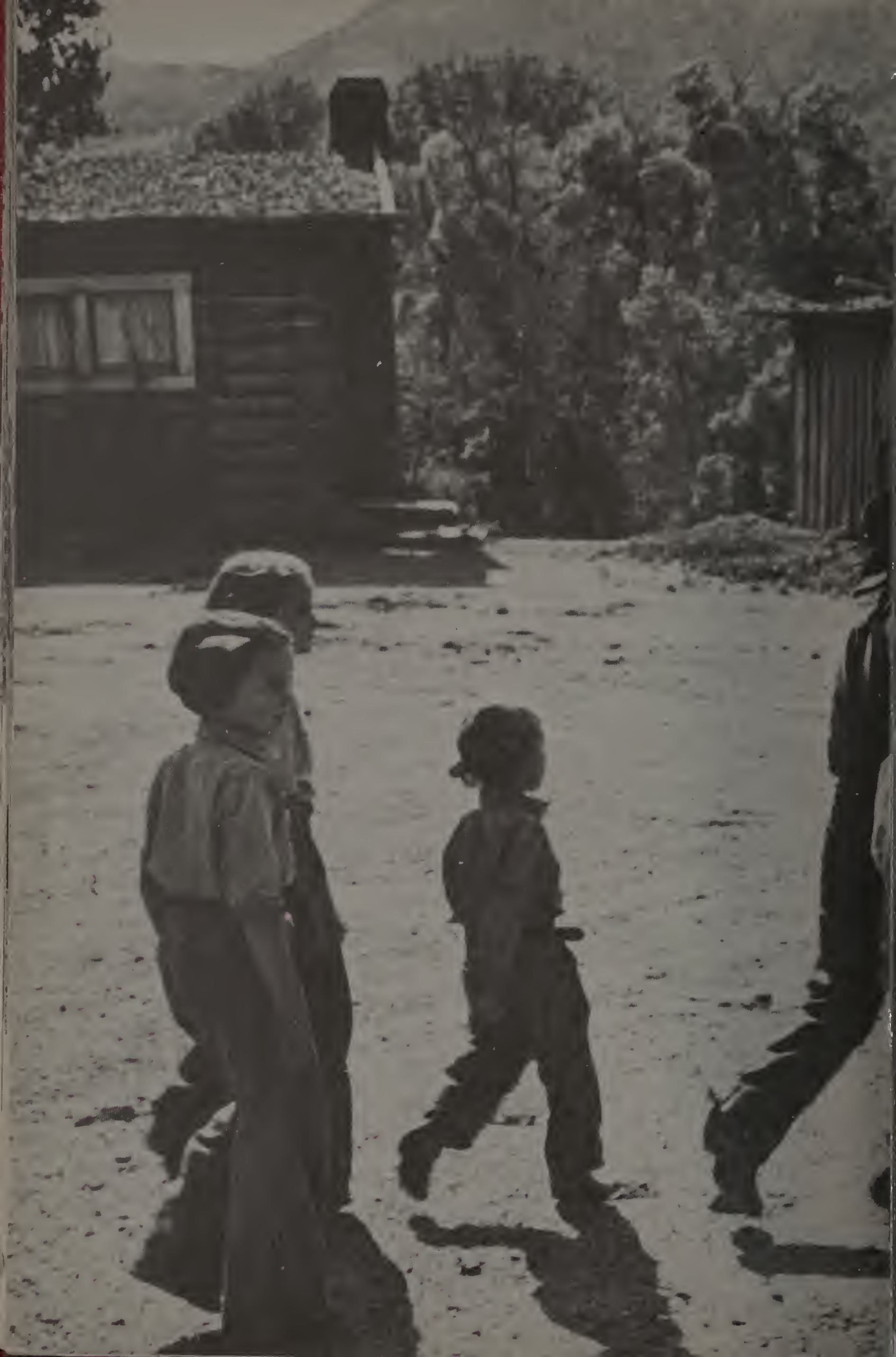
So they went down, and rode west and in a little while they saw two tiny figures standing on a hill and waving to them. The girls were so happy when they saw Jimmy and Pettibones leading their horses they almost kissed the boys, which would have been a terrible strain on their dignity.

One afternoon a few days later when Jimmy was sitting out in front of the saddle-house helping Owen, he heard Big Bones calling him and Pettibones. They both jumped up and ran across the yard.

When they got out behind the barn they saw the lady dudes they had rescued, and a couple of fine little calves.

"Now you can start your own herd and have a ranch of your own someday," they said. For a minute Jimmy and Pettibones were so happy they couldn't say a thing.

As they walked back to the ranch house for supper they figured they were just about the luckiest kids in the cow country.



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